Lafayette Historical Society **NEWS**

Enlightening Our Community

Lafayette, California | April 2014 | Vol. 42, No. 2

Our Next Speaker will make her presentation at our Annual Meeting and Potluck. If you cannot make the Potluck, please join us at 7:30 for Louise Pubols' discussion of "The People's Museum" - How Visitors and Communities Shape the Oakland Museum of California.

Lafayette Historical Society's Annual Meeting & Potluck

Louise Pubols

Date.....Wednesday, May 7, 2014
Place.....Lafayette Library & Learning Center – Community Hall
Time.....**6:00 p.m.** Social Hour.....**6:45 p.m.** Dinner
7:30 p.m. Short business meeting followed by:
Speaker....**Louise Pubols, Sr. Curator of History, Oakland Museum of California**
Topic.....**The "People's Museum" in Practice: How Visitors and Communities Shape the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA)**
Donation...**$10.00** LHS members; **$15.00** non-members requested
(PLUS – please bring your favorite hearty salad or casserole and remember to bring serving utensils)

For questions or reservations please call (925) 283-1848 or email Lafayette.History@comcast.net

OMCA Gallery

When it opened in 2010, the overall goal of the Oakland Museum of California's history gallery, called *Coming to California*, was to provide a new type of public space within the Museum—an inclusive place of inquiry, reflection, and public conversation about the history of California, with room for ongoing contributions by OMCA's communities over time. Many "permanent" galleries can end up as static displays, designed to last for 10 to 20 years with little change. At OMCA, we took a different tack, with a design that acknowledges that the story of California is unfolding, and includes our visitors' stories, as well as those who have come before us. The exhibition is a working prototype, designed to be easily changed, and with a number of participatory elements to reflect OMCA's position as "the people's museum." In this talk, Louise Pubols, the Senior Curator of History and lead curator for the project, will reflect on how our communities participated in the creation of the gallery, and how visitors continue to shape its content.

Louise Pubols

Louise Pubols is Senior Curator of History at the Oakland Museum of California. At the Oakland Museum, her projects included a major reinstallation of the museum's history galleries and a major exhibition on the environmental history of the San Francisco Bay, entitled *Above*

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President's Message

Many thanks to those of you who have renewed your memberships....to paraphrase Blanche in "A Streetcar Named Desire," the Historical Society is "dependant on the kindness of our friends." I hope that you are receiving our newsletters and program announcements and will take full advantage of what we offer to our members. And please let us know if you have suggestions for programs...we're always looking for interesting speakers.

Our Annual Membership Meeting and Pot Luck will be on Wednesday, May 7 in the Community Hall at the Library. Please look for more details in this newsletter. We hope you will be able to attend and hear our speaker Louise Pubols who will tell us why the Oakland Museum of California is known as the "Peoples' Museum."

Jennie Bickerstaff
Pioneer Schoolteacher
of Lafayette
Jennie the matron
Her schoolhouse
Jennie when she taught at Lafayette School
Jennie rode her horse, Topsy, to her teaching jobs in Lafayette and Moraga
Come see the Jennie Bickerstaff collection of artifacts in the Historical Society's display table in the library main room
Jennie by the gate to her house
LHS
Lafayette Historical Society
Jennie Bickerstaff Display

Look for an article in this issue about Kyra Mitchell and Kieran Smith, our newest (and youngest) volunteers!! We seem to attract interesting and interested volunteers who are bring new skills and enthusiasm to the organization! But we can always use more help – so if you have a couple of hours a week you'd like to devote to learning more about the history of the area and volunteering in the History Room, we'd love to have you join us.

Laura Torkelson, display creator extraordinaire, has put together a wonderful exhibit about Lafayette's beloved schoolteacher, Margaret Jennie Bickerstaff, in the Library. Please take the opportunity to visit this pictorial history of Miss Jennie's life. You'll find the display just outside the Homework Center and Walnut Room.

You may have noticed the beautiful signage the Historical Society has for its mailings, exhibits and other publicity.... we are blessed with a fabulous graphic artist on our Board who creates all of this for us and the price is right!! Thank you to John Otto for always making our public presence look so professional!!

Please check out the calendar of upcoming events in this issue for more dates and programs.

- Mary McCosker

Speaker Series: Louise Pubols

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and Below: Stories from Our Changing Bay. Her recent book, *The Father of All: The de la Guerra Family, Power, and Patriarchy in Mexican California* (Huntington Library Press and University of California Press, 2009), explores how patriarchy informed the economic and political systems of Mexican-era California. It has won both the William P. Clements Prize for best non-fiction book on the Southwest from the Clements Center at SMU, and the Ray Allen Billington prize from the Organization of American Historians.

Please join us on Wednesday, May 7 for our Annual Meeting and this very interesting presentation. Feel free to call the History Room with your questions at (925) 283-4106 or send an email to Lafayette.history@comcast.net. Reservations may also be made on our website www.lafayettehistory.org.

It Was Fifty Years Ago Today

Taxes and Traffic and Schools, Oh My....

By Ruth Bailey

This being the month we annually dance with the IRS, we thought you'd be interested in the tax situation in the county half a century ago. The State Board of Equalization issued a press release on taxation results for fiscal 1963-64, which noted that assessed property valuation in Contra Costa County was $1,042,992,000, making the county one of eight in the state with an assessed valuation exceeding one billion.

The report said the total general property tax levy amounted to $92,289,000, representing 8.85% of the assessed valuation. While not the highest in the state (that doubtful honor went to neighboring Alameda County, with a 9.73% levy), Contra Costa's percentage was above average for the state, which reported a flat 8%.

In July of 1964, *The Sun* questioned whether after-school recreation programs were out for the schools, in the light of salary increases. The Board of Trustees passed a Lafayette schools budget of $2,274,911, an increase of about $175,000 from the previous year. [The 2013-14 adopted Lafayette schools budget was $29,771,054 revenue; $30,390,698 total expenditures] The 1964 Board President Boardman Moore acknowledged, "There is no provision for the after-school recreation program. We're pretty much trapped with dollars committed already." About 60% of the increase was earmarked for salaries. Principals, assistant principals and classified personnel were given a 5% salary boost. The superintendent's salary jumped from $16,000 to $17,000; the assistant superintendent's pay was also boosted $1,000, to $14,500, and the business manager's salary went from $12,000 to $13,000.

Seven teachers were added, instead of the three positions forecast in April's tentative budget. Among the economies was eliminating $7000 to pay salaries for teachers directing the after-school recreation program.

Schools had been leading the news since early in 1964, when *The Sun* headlined: "TV Hookup Will Pioneer School Education System; Students Will Learn Spanish in 10 Schools." According to the story, "More than 61,000 feet of coaxial cable will link 10 Lafayette schools together in February, in what's been described as the first educational television network of its type in Northern California. The school district will pioneer teaching by television as a method of meeting a state law calling for grade school foreign language instruction by September 1965.

"Lafayette, Happy Valley, Ellis, Springhill, Montecito, Stanley, Burton Valley, Vallecito, Fairview and Merriewood elementary schools will be hooked up. Pupils in 6th, 7th and 8th grades will receive Spanish instruction as a forerunner to a larger number of courses to be developed in the school system. Expansion plans include sub-6th grade levels, and offer social studies, science and music. TV offers a cheaper and better way of getting each pupil almost once a day," the superintendent said.

In 1964, the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce took a bold step and, by a vote of 17-7, endorsed lowering the speed limit on Mt. Diablo [then called the Highway] from 35 to 25 miles per hour. The county and Highway Patrol were against the plan when it was first proposed by the Chamber, but decided to give it a try for six months.

During the trial, merchants were asked to keep a record of store traffic and see whether the speed limit change increased sales. "We have never used the economic factor before," said Captain Edward Jelich of the California Highway Patrol.

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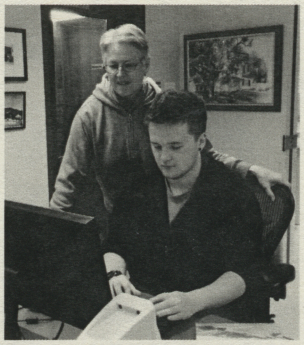
Meet Our Volunteers

Kieran Smith

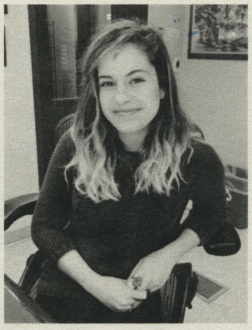


Kieran Smith consults with LHS President Mary McCosker

Kieran grew up in England, starting life in Yorkshire and later moving closer to London. He did nursery through middle school in England before starting high school in Madrid, Spain. His parents' jobs in the tech industry have frequently moved his family around the world. He now lives in Lafayette where he is a Senior at Acalanes High School. After high school he will attend the University of Alaska Southeast where he will pursue a BA in Social Science.

Kieran began volunteering at the History Room to earn community service hours for a high school requirement. He works for four hours on Saturday mornings and helps out where needed. He has done administrative work and helped with preparing an historical display for the Library. He is currently doing an inventory on the books in the archival library. He enjoys working at the Historical Society because he is a history lover and is enjoying learning more about Lafayette history (although there is a lot less of it than English history)!

Kyra Mitchell



Kyra Mitchell

Kyra is originally from San Diego. She came to the Lamorinda area to attend St. Mary's College from which she graduated in May 2013 with a B.A. in Art History. After graduation she decided to take a year off, working full-time as a nanny while picking up volunteer shifts at the Asian Art Museum and the Lafayette Historical Society. She also co-hosted and helped put together the first Juried Art and Art History Alumni Exhibition at St. Mary's in January. The kick-off was fantastic.

In March she travelled to New York for an interview with Christie's Education. She applied to their Arts of Europe: Antiquity, Middle Ages, and Renaissance program located in London. Just three days after her interview she received a phone call with an offer to join the program! She will be leaving for London this September but in the meantime she will continue to volunteer in the History Room and at the Asian Art Museum.

A typical shift at the History Room includes doing research and writing articles for the quarterly newsletter. She has written two articles thus far: "Who is Mamie Joseph" and "The Dark Knights," and hopes to write more. Her current on-going project involves working with Historypin, "a global community collaborating around history." Her job is to research LHS photograph archives and choose historical events, places, and sometimes people to upload and pin to the map. She gives an explanation as to the content of the photograph and why it is significant. She also accesses the LHS Facebook page to promote our Historypin site and encourages the LHS community to stay up-to-date with our preservation of Lafayette's history. She says it is a joy to be a part of LHS and she look forward to continuing to work with her fellow residents and advocates of Lafayette's past!

What's in the works for Summer Programs from LHS:

Save ***Wednesday, July 2 at 2:30*** for a commemoration of the July 17, 1944 Port Chicago explosion. ***Wayne Korsinen***, local World War II Historian and ***Isabel Jenkins Ziegler***, Supervisory Museum Curator at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine NM will provide historic and current perspectives on this significant local disaster.

Nilda Rego, Contra Costa Historian and author of "Days Gone By" has agreed to speak for us this summer. Watch for an announcement of this date soon!

And electric railroad expert and keeper of *"EastBayHillsProject.org"* – Stu Swiedler will present another of his well received talks on the electric railroad and its impact on our area. That program will be scheduled soon as well.

2013-2014 Board of Directors

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Those Trees!

Remember in January we asked you if you knew where the trees that had been in front of the temporary Post Office were now? Helene Kremer had an idea, but it wasn't correct. Those trees have grown up in the back of the Springhill School playground! And are still shading generations of Lafayette kids today!

Post Office Trees Today

It Was Fifty Years Ago Today

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He added that 19,000 cars use Mt. Diablo Highway in a typical 24-hour period. [This was before Hwy. 24 opened. In 2014, approximately 23,800 cars per 24 hours use Mt. Diablo Blvd. east of Moraga Road, according to Leah Greenblat, City of Lafayette transportation planner.]

A week after the reduced speed announcement, a letter published in *The Sun* carried a strong reaction to the change. The Lafayette resident charged that the reduced speed limit "was unconstitutional and mainly for the benefit of retail businesses in this area." He indicated that he'd written to the Board of Supervisors that the only purpose is to benefit a private group. "It will prove to be unconstitutional as soon as it is tested in the lowest traffic court," he predicted, adding, "The new speed limit places the CHP in a position of arresting speeders—not because they are driving dangerously, but because slower speeds are needed to benefit retail sales."

No wonder citizens were upset - at the turn of the century the speed limit was 90-miles an hour!

Editors Note: Watch for Ruth Bailey's historical articles in the monthly issues of "Lafayette Today"

Lafayette Historical Society
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, CA 94549
www.LafayetteHistory.org

Return Service Requested

Lafayette Historical Society Membership Application

(Please photocopy form for additional names)

Name: _____

Spouse: _____

Address: _____

City-Zip: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Membership Categories and Annual Dues

(Please check one)

- ❑ Student Membership $10.00
- ❑ Individual Membership $25.00
- ❑ Family Membership $50.00
- ❑ Sponsor Membership $500.00

Please indicate areas of special interest

- ❑ Publicity
- ❑ Research-Genealogy
- ❑ Telephoning
- ❑ Displays
- ❑ Oral Histories
- ❑ History Room
- ❑ Data Base Entry of Photos
- ❑ Photo Collection
- ❑ News Clippings
- ❑ Fire Engine
- ❑ Walking Tours-Outreach
- ❑ Other_____

Please mail this application to:

Lafayette Historical Society
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, CA 94549